THE CASE OF JENNIE BRICE

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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PROLOGUE.

Was Jennie Brice murdered?

If she were murdered, who was guilty of the foul deed?

If she were not done away with by an assassin, what became of her?

Whence did she disappear?

These and a few other interesting questions are raised at once in this very clever tale of mystery written by a woman who is not only an adept at writing fiction of this character, but the possessor of a style that chains the interest by its clearness and directness and wins by its rich humor.

CHAPTER I.

WE have just had another flood, bad enough, but only a foot or two of water on the first floor. Yesterday we got the mud shoveled out of the cellar and found Peter, the spaniel that Mr. Ladley left when he "went away." The flood, and the fact that it was Mr. Ladley's dog whose body was found half buried in the basement fruit closet, brought back to me the strange events of the other flood five years ago, when the water reached more than half way to the second story, and brought with it, to some, mystery and sudden death, and to me the worst case of "shingles" I have ever seen.

My name is Pitman—in this narrative. It is not really Pitman, but that does well enough. I belong to an old Pittsburgh family. I was born on Penn avenue, when that was the best part of town, and I lived, until I was fifteen, very close to what is now the Pittsburgh club. It was a dwelling then; I have forgotten who lived there at that time.

I was a girl in '77, during the railroad riots, and I recall our driving in the family carriage over to one of the Allegheny hills, and seeing the yards burning, and a great noise of shooting from across the river. It was the next year that I ran away from school to marry Mr. Pitman, and I have not known my family since. We were never reconciled, although I came back to Pittsburgh after twenty years of wandering. Mr. Pitman was dead; the old city called me, and I came.

I had a hundred dollars or so, and I took a house in lower Allegheny, where, because they are partly inundated every spring, the rents are cheap, and I kept boarders. My house was always orderly and clean, and although the neighborhood had a bad name, a good many theatrical people stopped with me. Five minutes across the bridge and they were in the theater district. Allegheny at that time, I believe, was still an independent city. But since then it has allied itself with Pittsburgh; it is now the north side of the city.

I was glad to get back. I worked hard, but I made my rent and my living and a little over. Now and then on summer evenings I went to one of the parks and, sitting on a bench, watched the children playing around and looked at my sister's house, closed for the summer. It is a very large house. Her butler once had his wife boarding with me—a very nice little woman.

It is curious to recall that at that time, five years ago, I had never seen my niece, Lida Harvey, and then to think that only the day before yesterday she came in her automobile as far as she dared and then sat there, waving to me, while the police patrol brought across in a skiff a basket of provisions she had sent me.

I wonder what she would have thought had she known that the elderly woman in a calico wrapper, with an old overcoat over it and a pair of rubber boots, was her full aunt.

The flood and the sight of Lida both brought back the case of Jennie Brice, for even then Lida and Mr. Howell were interested in each other.

This is April. The flood of 1907 was earlier, in March. It had been a long hard winter, with ice gorges in all the upper valley. Then in early March there came a thaw. The gorges broke up and began to come down, filling the rivers with crushing, grinding ice.

There are three rivers at Pittsburgh, the Allegheny and the Monongahela uniting there at the point to form the Ohio. And all three were covered with broken ice, logs and all sorts of debris from the upper valleys.

A warning was sent out from the weather bureau, and I got my carpets ready to lift that morning. That was on the 4th of March, a Sunday. Mr. Ladley and his wife, Jennie Brice, had the parlor bedroom and the room behind it. Mrs. Ladley, or Miss Brice, as she preferred to be known, had a small part at a local theater that kept a permanent company. Her husband was in that business, too, but he had nothing to do. It was the wife who paid the bills, and a lot of quarreling they did about it.

I knocked at the door at 10 o'clock, and Mr. Ladley opened it. He was a short man, rather stout and getting bald, and he always had a cigarette. Even yet the parlor carpet smells of them.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply, holding the door open about an inch.

"The water's coming up very fast, Mr. Ladley," I said. "It's up to the swinging shelf in the cellar now. I'd like to take up the carpet and move the piano."

"Come back in an hour or so," he snapped and tried to close the door. But I had got my toe in the crack.

"I'll have to have the piano moved, Mr. Ladley," I said. "You'd better put off what you are doing."

I thought he was probably writing. He spent most of the day writing.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

using the washstand as a desk, and it kept me busy with oxalic acid taking ink spots out of the splasher and the towels. He was writing a play and talked a lot about the Shuberts having promised to star him in it when it was finished.

"H——!" he said, and, turning, spoke to somebody in the room.

"We can go into the back room," I heard him say, and he closed the door. When he opened it again the room was empty. I called in Terry, the Irishman who does odd jobs for me now and then, and we both got to work at the tacks in the carpet, Terry working by the window and I by the door into the back parlor, which the Ladleys used as a bedroom.

That was how I happened to hear what I afterward told the police.

Some one—a man, but not Mr. Ladley—was talking. Mrs. Ladley broke in: "I won't do it!" she said flatly. "Why should I help him? He doesn't help me. He loafs here all day, smoking and sleeping, and sits up all night, drinking and keeping me awake."

The voice went on again, as if in reply to this, and I heard a rattle of glasses, as if they were pouring drinks. They always had whisky, even when they were behind with their board.

"That's all very well," Mrs. Ladley said. I could always hear her, she having a theatrical sort of voice—one that carries. "But what about the prying she devil that runs the house?"

"Hush, for God's sake!" broke in Mr. Ladley, and after that they spoke in whispers. Even with my ear against the panel I could not catch a word.

The men came just then to move the piano, and by the time we had taken it and the furniture upstairs the water was over the kitchen floor and creeping forward into the hall. I had never seen the river come up so fast. By noon the yard was full of floating ice, and at 3 that afternoon the police skiff was on the front streets, and I was wading around in rubber boots, taking the pictures off the walls.

I was too busy to see who the Ladleys' visitor was and he had gone when I remembered him again. The Ladleys took the second story front, which was empty, and Mr. Reynolds, who was in the silk department in a store across the river, had the room just behind.

I put up a coal stove in a back room next the bathroom and managed to cook the dinner there. I was washing up the dishes when Mr. Reynolds came in. As it was Sunday he was in his slippers and had the colored supplement of a morning paper in his hand.

"What's the matter with the Ladleys?" he asked. "I can't read for their quarreling."

"Booze, probably," I said. "When you've lived in the flood district as long as I have, Mr. Reynolds, you'll know that the rising of the river is a signal for every man in the vicinity to stop work and get full. The fuller the river the fuller the male population."

"Then this flood will likely make 'em drink themselves to death!" he said. "It's a lulu."

"It's the neighborhood's annual debauch. The women are busy in the cellars, or they'd get full too. I hope, since it's come this far, it will come farther, so the landlord will have to paper the parlor."

That was at 3 o'clock. At 4 Mr. Ladley went down the stairs, and I heard him getting into a skiff in the lower hall. There were boats going back and forth all the time carrying crowds of curious people and taking the flood sufferers to the corner grocery, where they were lowering groceries in a basket on a rope from an upper window.

I had been making tea when I heard Mr. Ladley go out. I fixed a tray with a cup of it and some crackers and took it to their door. I had never liked Mrs. Ladley, but it was chilly in the house with the gas shut off and the lower floor full of ice water. And it is hard enough to keep boarders in the flood district.

She did not answer to my knocks, so I opened the door and went in. She was at the window, looking after him, and the brown valise that figured in the case later was opened on the floor. Over the foot of the bed was the black and white dress with the red collar.

When I spoke to her she turned around quickly. She was a tall woman, about twenty-eight, with very white teeth and yellow hair, which she parted a little to one side and drew down over her ears. She had a sullen face and large well shaped hands, with her nails long and very pointed.

"The 'she devil' has brought you some tea," I said. "Where shall she put it?"

"'She devil!'" she repeated, raising her eyebrows. "It's a very thoughtful she devil. Who called you that?"

But with the sight of the valise and the fear that they might be leaving I thought it best not to quarrel. She had left the window and, going to her dressing table, had picked up her nail file.

"Never mind," I said. "I hope you are not going away. These floods don't last, and they're a benefit. Plenty of the people around here rely on 'em every year to wash out their cellars."

"No, I'm not going away," she replied lazily. "I'm taking that dress to Miss Hope at the theater. She is going to wear it in 'Charlie's Aunt' next week. She hasn't half enough of a wardrobe to play leads in stock. Look at this thumb nail, broken to the quick!"

If I had only looked to see which thumb it was! But I was putting the tea tray on the washstand and moving Mr. Ladley's papers to find room for it. Peter, the spaniel, begged for a lump of sugar, and I gave it to him.

"Where is Mr. Ladley?" I asked.

"Gone out to see the river."

"I hope he'll be careful. There's a drowning or two every year in these floods."

"Then I hope he won't," she said calmly. "Do you know what I was doing when you came in? I was looking after his boat and hoping it had a hole in it."

"You won't feel that way tomorrow, Mrs. Ladley," I protested, shocked. "You're just nervous and put out. Most men have their ugly times. Many a time I wished Mr. Pitman was gone—until he went. Then I'd have given a good bit to have him back again."

She was standing in front of the dresser, fixing her hair over her ears. She turned and looked at me over her shoulder.

"Probably Mr. Pitman was a man," she said. "My husband is a fiend, a devil."

Well, a good many women have said that to me at different times. But just let me say such a thing to them, or repeat their own words to them the next day, and they would fly at me in a fury. So I said nothing and put the cream into her tea.

I never saw her again.

* * * * * * *

There is not much sleeping done in the flood district during a spring flood. The gas was shut off and I gave Mr. Reynolds and the Ladleys each a lamp. I sat in the back room that I had made into a temporary kitchen with a candle and with a bedquilt around my shoulders. The water rose fast in the lower hall, but by midnight at the seventh step it stopped rising and stood still. I always have a skiff during the flood season, and as the water rose I tied it to one spindle of the staircase after another.

I made myself a cup of tea and at 1 o'clock I stretched out on a sofa for a few hours' sleep. I think I had been sleeping only an hour or so when some one touched me on the shoulder and I started up. It was Mr. Reynolds, partly dressed.

"Some one has been in the house, Mrs. Pitman," he said. "They went away just now in the boat."

"Perhaps it was Peter," I suggested. "That dog is always wandering around at night."

"Not unless Peter can row a boat," said Mr. Reynolds dryly.

I got up, being already full dressed, and taking the [illegible] staircase. I noticed that it was a minute or so after 2 o'clock as we left the room. The boat was gone, not untied, but cut loose. The end of the rope was still fastened to the stair rail. I sat down on the stairs and looked at Mr. Reynolds.

"It's gone!" I said. "If the house catches fire we'll have to drown."

"It's rather curious when you consider it." We both spoke softly not to disturb the Ladleys. "I've been awake and I heard no boat come in. And yet if no one came in a boat and came from the street they would have had to swim in."

I felt queer and creepy. The street door was open, of course, and the lights going beyond. It gave me a strange feeling to sit there in the darkness on the stairs, with the arch of the front door like the entrance to a cavern, and see now and then a chunk of ice slide into view, turn around in the eddy and pass on. It was bitter cold, too, and the wind was rising.

"I'll go through the house," said Mr. Reynolds. "There's likely nothing worse the matter than some drunken mill hand on a vacation while the mills are under water. But I'd better look."

He left me, and I sat there alone in the darkness. I had a presentiment of something wrong, but I tried to think it was only discomfort and the cold. The water, driven in by the wind, swirled at my feet. And something dark floated in and lodged on the step below. I reached down and touched it. It was a dead kitten. I had never known a dead cat to bring me anything but bad luck, and here was one washed in at my very feet.

CHAPTER II.

MR. REYNOLDS came back soon and reported the house quiet and in order.

"But I found Peter shut up in one of the third floor rooms," he said. "Did you put him there?"

I had not and said so, but as the dog went everywhere and the door might have blown shut we did not attach much importance to that at the time.

Well, the skiff was gone, and there was no use worrying about it until morning. I went back to the sofa to keep warm, but I left my candle lighted and my door open. I did not sleep. The dead cat was on my mind, and as if it were not bad enough to have it washed in at my feet about 4 in the morning Peter, prowling uneasily, discovered it and brought it in and put it on my couch, wet and stiff, poor little thing!

I looked at the clock. It was a quarter after 4, and except for the occasional crunch of one ice cake hitting another in the yard, everything was quiet. And then I heard the stealthy sound of oars in the lower hall.

I am not a brave woman. I lay there, hoping Mr. Reynolds would hear and open his door. But he was sleeping soundly. Peter snarled and ran out into the hall, and the next moment I heard Mr. Ladley speaking. "Down, Peter," he said. "Down. Go and lie down."

I took my candle and went out into the hall. Mr. Ladley was stooping over the boat, trying to tie it to the staircase. The rope was short, having been cut, and he was having trouble. Perhaps it was the candle light, but he looked ghost white and haggard.

"I borrowed your boat, Mrs. Pitman," he said, civilly enough. "Mrs. Ladley was not well, and I—I went to the drug store."

"You've been more than two hours going to the drug store," I said.

He muttered something about not finding any open at first and went into

"I borrowed your boat, Mrs. Pitman."

his room. He closed and locked the door behind him and, although Peter whined and scratched, he did not let him in.

He looked so agitated that I thought I had been harsh and perhaps she was really ill. I knocked at the door and asked if I could do anything. But he only called "No!" curtly through the door and asked me to take that infernal dog away.

I went back to bed and tried to sleep, for the water had dropped an inch or so on the stairs, and I knew the danger was over. Peter came, shivering, at dawn and got on to the sofa with me. I put an end of the quilt over him, and he stopped shivering after a time and went to sleep.

The dog was company. I lay there, wide awake, thinking about Mr. Pitman's death, and how I had come by degrees to be keeping a cheap boarding house in the flood district and to having to take impudence from everybody who chose to rent a room from me and to being called a she devil. From that I got to thinking again about the Ladleys and how she had said he was a fiend and to doubting about his having gone out for medicine for her. I dozed off again at daylight, and being worn out I slept heavily.

At 7 o'clock Mr. Reynolds came to the door, dressed for the store. He was a tall man of about fifty, neat and orderly in his habits, and he always remembered that I had seen better days and treated me as a lady.

"Never mind about breakfast for me this morning, Mrs. Pitman," he said. "I'll get a cup of coffee at the other end of the bridge. I'll take the boat and send it back with Terry."

He turned and went along the hall and down to the boat. I heard him push off from the stairs with an oar and row out into the street. Peter followed him to the stairs.

At a quarter after 7 Mr. Ladley came out and called to me: "Just bring in a cup of coffee and some toast," he said. "Enough for one."

He went back and slammed his door and I made his coffee. I steeped a cup of tea for Mrs. Ladley at the same time. He opened the door just wide enough for the tray and took it without so much as a "thank you." He had a cigarette in his mouth as usual and I could see a fire in the grate and smell something like scorching cloth.

"I hope Mrs. Ladley is better," I said, getting my foot in the crack of the door so he could not quite close it. It smelled to me as if he had accidentally set fire to something with his cigarette and I tried to see into the room.

"What about Mrs. Ladley?" he snapped.

"You said she was ill last night."

"Oh, yes! Well, she wasn't very sick. She's better."

"Shall I bring her some tea?"

"Take your foot away!" he ordered. "No. She doesn't want tea. She's not here."

"Not here!"

"Good heavens!" he snarled. "Is her going away anything to make such a fuss about? The Lord knows I'd be glad to get out of this infernal pig wallow myself."

"If you mean my house"— I began.

But he had pulled himself together and was more polite when he answered: "I mean the neighborhood. Your house is all that could be desired for the money. If we do not have linen sheets and double cream we are paying muslin and milk prices."

Either my nose was growing accustomed to the odor or it was dying away. I took my foot away from the door. "When did Mrs. Ladley leave?" I asked.

"This morning, very early. I rowed her to Federal street."

"You couldn't have had much sleep," I said dryly, for he looked horrible. There were lines around his eyes, which were red, and his lips looked dry and cracked.

"She's not in the piece this week at the theater," he said, licking his lips and looking past me, not at me. "She'll be back by Saturday."

I did not believe him. I do not think he imagined that I did. He shut the door in my face, and it caught poor Peter by the nose. The dog ran off howling, but although Mr. Ladley had been as fond of the animal as it was in his nature to be fond of anything, he paid no attention. As I started down the hall after him I saw what Peter had been carrying—a slipper of Mrs. Ladley's. It was soaked with water. Evidently Peter had found it floating at the foot of the stairs.

Although the idea of murder had not entered my head at that time, the slipper gave me a turn. I picked it up and looked at it, a black one with a beaded toe, short in the vamp and high heeled, the sort most actresses wear. Then I went back and knocked at the door of the front room again.

"What the devil do you want now?" he called from beyond the door.

"Here's a slipper of Mrs. Ladley's," I said. "Peter found it floating in the lower hall."

He opened the door wide and let me in. The room was in tolerable order, much better than when Mrs. Ladley was about. He looked at the slipper, but he did not touch it. "I don't think that is hers," he said.

"I've seen her wear it a hundred times."

"Well, she'll never wear it again." And then, seeing me stare, he added: "It's ruined with the water. Throw it out. And, by the way, I'm sorry, but I set fire to one of the pillow slips; dropped asleep, and my cigarette did the rest. Just put it on the bill."

He pointed to the bed. One of the pillows had no slip, and the ticking cover had a scorch or two on it. I went over and looked at it.

"The pillow will have to be paid for, too, Mr. Ladley," I said. "And there's a sign nailed on the door that forbids smoking in bed. If you are going to set fire to things I shall have to charge extra."

"Really?" he jeered, looking at me with his cold, fishy eyes. "Is there any sign on the door saying that boarders are charged extra for seven feet of filthy river in the bedrooms?"

I was never a match for him, and I make it a principle never to bandy words with my boarders. I took the pillow and the slipper and went out. The telephone was ringing on the stair landing. It was the theater, asking for Miss Brice.

"She has gone away," I said.

"What do you mean? Moved away?"

"Gone for a few days' vacation," I replied. "She isn't playing this week, is she?"

"Wait a moment," said the voice. There was a hum of conversation from the other end, and then another man came to the telephone.

"Can you find out where Miss Brice has gone?"

"I'll see."

I went to Ladley's door and knocked. Mr. Ladley answered from just beyond.

"The theater is asking where Mrs. Ladley is."

"Tell them I don't know," he snarled, and shut the door. I took his message to the telephone.

Whoever it was swore and hung up the receiver.

All the morning I was uneasy—I hardly knew why. Peter felt it as I did. There was no sound from the Ladleys' room, and the house was quiet, except for the lapping water on the stairs and the police patrol going back and forth.

At 11 o'clock a boy in the neighborhood, paddling on a raft, fell into the water and was drowned. I watched the police boat go past, carrying his little cold body, and after that I was good for nothing. I went and sat with Peter on the stairs. The dog's conduct had been strange all morning. He had sat just above the water, looking at it and whimpering. Perhaps he was expecting another kitten or—

It is hard to say how ideas first enter one's mind. But the notion that Mr. Ladley had killed his wife and thrown her body into the water came to me as I sat there. All at once I seemed to see it all—the quarreling the day before, the night trip in the boat, the water soaked slipper, his haggard face that morning—even the way the spaniel sat and stared at the flood.

Terry brought the boat back at half past 11, towing it behind another.

"Well," I said from the stairs, "I hope you've had a pleasant morning."

"What doing?" he asked, not looking at me.

"Rowing about the streets. You've had that boat for hours."

He tied it up without a word to me, but he spoke to the dog. "Good morning, Peter," he said. "It's nice weather—for fishes, ain't it?"

He picked out a bit of floating wood from the water, and, showing it to the dog, flung it into the parlor. Peter went after it with a splash. He was pretty fat, and when he came back I heard him wheezing. But what he brought back was not the stick of wood. It was the knife I use for cutting bread. It had been on a shelf in the room where I had slept the night before, and now Peter brought it out of the flood where its wooden handle had kept it afloat. The blade was broken off short.

It is not unusual to find one's household goods floating around during flood time. More than once I've lost a chair or two and seen it after the water had gone down, new scrubbed and painted, in Molly Maguire's kitchen next door. And perhaps now and then a bit of luck would come to me—a dog kennel or a chicken house, or a kitchen table, or even, as happened once, a month old baby in a wooden cradle, that lodged against my back fence and had come forty miles, as it turned out, with no worse mishap than a cold in its head.

But the knife was different. I had put it on the mantel over the stove I was using upstairs the night before and hadn't touched it since. As I sat staring at it, Terry took it from Peter and handed it to me.

"Better give me a penny, Mrs. Pitman," he said in his impudent Irish way. "I hate to give you a knife. It may cut our friendship."

I reached over to hit him a clout on the head, but I did not. The sunlight was coming in through the window at the top of the stairs, and shining on the rope that was tied to the banister. The end of the rope was covered with stains, bright with a glint of red in them.

I got up shivering. "You can get the meat at the butcher's, Terry," I said, "and come back for me in half an hour." Then I turned and went upstairs, weak in the knees, to put on my hat and coat. I had made up my mind that there had been murder done.

I looked at my clock as I went downstairs. It was just 12:30. I thought of telephoning for Mr. Reynolds to meet me, but it was his lunch hour, and besides, I was afraid to telephone from the house while Mr. Ladley was in it.

Peter had been whining again. When I came down the stairs he had stopped whimpering and was wagging his tail. A strange boat had put into the hallway and was coming back.

"Now, old boy!" somebody was saying from the boat. "Steady, old chap! I've got something for you!"

A little man, elderly and alert, was standing up in the boat, poling it along with an oar. Peter gave vent to joyful yelps. The elderly gentleman brought his boat to a stop at the foot of the stairs and, reaching down into a tub at his feet, held up a large piece of raw liver. Peter almost went crazy, and I remember suddenly that I had forgotten to feed the poor beast for more than a day.

"Would you like it?" asked the gentleman. Peter sat up, as he had been taught to do, and barked. The gentleman reached down again, got a wooden platter from a stack of them at his feet and, placing the liver on it, put it on the step. The whole thing was so neat and businesslike that I could only gaze.

"That's a well trained dog, madam," said the elderly gentleman, beaming at Peter over his glasses. "You should not have neglected him."

"The flood put him out of my mind," I explained, humbly enough, for I was ashamed.

"Exactly. Do you know how many starving dogs and cats I have found this morning?" He took a notebook out of his pocket and glanced at it. "Forty-eight! Forty-eight, madam! And ninety-three cats! I have found them marooned in trees, clinging to fences, floating on barrels, and I have found them in comfortable houses where there was no excuse for their neglect. Well, I must be moving on. I have the report of a cat with a new litter in the loft of a stable near here."

He wiped his hands carefully on a fresh paper napkin, of which also a heap rested on one of the seats of the boat, and picked up an oar, smiling benevolently at Peter. Then suddenly he bent over and looked at the stained rope end tied to the stair rail.

"What's that?" he said.

"That's what I'm going to find out," I replied. I glanced up at the Ladleys' door, but it was closed.

The little man dropped his oar and, fumbling in his pockets, pulled out a small magnifying gloss. He bent over, holding to the rail, and inspected the stains with the glass. I had taken a fancy to him at once, and in spite of my excitement I had to smile a little.

"Humph," he said and looked up at me; "that's blood! Why did you cut the boat loose?"

"I didn't," I said. "If that is blood I want to know how it got there. That was a new rope last night." I glanced at the Ladleys' door again, and he followed my eyes.

"I wonder," he said, raising his voice a little, "if I come into your kitchen if you will allow me to fry a little of that liver. There's a wretched Maltese in a tree at the corner of Fourth street that won't touch it raw."

I saw that he wanted to talk to me, so I turned around and led the way to the temporary kitchen I had made.

"Now," he said briskly when he had closed the door, "there's something wrong here. Perhaps if you will tell me I can help. If I can't it will do you good to talk about it. My name's Holcombe, retired merchant. Apply to First National bank for references."

"I'm not sure there is anything wrong," I began. "I guess I'm only nervous and thinking little things are big ones. There's nothing to tell."

"Nonsense. I come down the street in my boat. A white faced gentleman, with a cigarette, looks out from a window when I stop at the door and ducks back when I glance up. I come in and find a pet dog, obviously overfed at ordinary times, whining with hunger on the stairs. As I prepare to feed him a pale woman comes down, trying to put a right hand glove on her left hand and with her jacket wrong side out. What am I to think?"

I started and looked at my coat. He was right. And when as I tried to take it off he helped me and even patted me on the shoulder—what with his kindness and the long morning alone, worrying, and the sleepless night, I began to cry. He had a clean handkerchief in my hand before I had time to think of one.

"That's it," he said. "It will do you good, only don't make a noise about it. If it's a husband on the annual flood spree don't worry, madam. They always come around in time to whitewash the cellars."

"It isn't a husband," I sniffled.

"Tell me about it," he said. There was something so kindly in his face and it was so long since I had had a bit of human sympathy that I almost broke down again.

(To be Continued Next Saturday.)

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